

A HELPING HAND FROM THE DIVINE.

NOTES ON THE TRIUMPHALIST ICONOGRAPHY OF THE EARLY THEODOSIANS

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ABSTRACT

This article will provide a contextualised look at the variegated manifestations of how Theodosius and his immediate successors sought to refer to divine support in their triumphalist propaganda. In it, particular attention will be devoted to the ambiguities and double-meanings of a set of intentionally polysemic signifiers with both iconographic and rhetorical roots in the earlier Roman triumphal ideology. These compromises between Christian and more ambiguously ‘non-denominational’ references to divine favour were, I will argue, deployed in an open-ended fashion especially during Theodosius’ early rule – a legitimating technique that seems to have been successful, although its contents should alert us to the insufficiency of seeing Theodosian rulership as monochromatically ‘Christian’. After having been elaborated during the decades around 400, these forms of projecting imperial triumphalism came to play a long-standing part in the East Roman and Byzantine ideology of divine favour.*

After Adrianople: barbarian crises and moralistic discourse

In September 394, the emperor Theodosius defeated the army of the Western usurper Eugenius and his *magister militum* Flavius Arbogast in a two-day battle near river Frigidus, in modern-day Slovenia. This victory consolidated the whole empire under his rule and paved way for a series of extensive administrative and custodian arrangements that set the scene for the reigns of Arcadius and Honorius. The narrative permutations of the religious (as well as other) themes affixed to Theodosius’ victory in this battle have now been extensively reviewed in Cameron 2011.¹ He has, for instance, decisively dismissed certain previous assumptions, based on Theodoret’s dramatized version of the battle in Book 5 of his *Ecclesiastical History*, about Eugenius’ army marching under the particular protection of the pagan insignia of Hercules and Juppiter (106f.).

But even if the battle of Frigidus was not perceived at the time as the decisive showdown between Christians and pagans, it seems safe to say that notions of providentiality and divine favour were present very soon thereafter. The motif of a divinely sent wind turning the weapons of the western army back on themselves appears in Ambrose and further in Claudian, who probably included it as a polyvalent literary element, wherein the obvious triumphalism of the motif was expressed via an allusion to Silius Italicus’ description of Carrhae.² Another component of the battle narratives on the Frigidus that easily lent itself to a rhetoric of providentiality was the important part played by Gothic *foederati* in the army of Theodosius. In reflecting on

* Substantial parts of this article originate in a paper (‘Heracles as an exemplum in Late Imperial and Early Byzantine Triumphal Propaganda’) given on 14 March 2014 in the international colloquium *Varia Byzantina* in the University of Helsinki. Several aspects of my argument, particularly about propagandising Gaius’ fall, have been put forth in my doctoral thesis (*Istae contra omnium religiones. Characterizing Northern Barbarian Religiosity in the Graeco-Roman Literary Tradition from Hellenism to the Later Empire*. <http://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/93639>). Some of the questions associated with imperial triumphalism had first been broached in a work-in-progress paper (‘*Imperatores semper Herculii*: Some Herculean Themes in Late Imperial Propaganda’) in the Faculty of Classics, University of Oxford, in June 2010. During this relatively long gestation process of the subject, I have received extremely helpful feedback from a great number of colleagues, too numerous to be named here, but most warmly thanked nonetheless.

¹ Cameron 2011, 93-131. Also see Gualandri 2000; Salzman 2010.

² Cameron 2011, 112-116.

what was alleged to have been the death of ten thousand Goths in the battle, Orosius famously claimed that their deaths had been a boon to the Romans, and their casualties a victory.³

The crucial background for Roman attitudes towards the Goths around the time of Frigidus must be sought from the Gothic War of the late 370s and early 380s, during which the Romans had been profoundly shocked by the defeat and death of Valens at the battle of Adrianople (in August 378). The reverberations of this serious setback can be detected in many Theodosian policies, and some of the most disagreeable opinions of source authors are to some extent exacerbated by the climate of fear following Adrianople. Ammianus, for instance, commends the way in which *magister militiae* Julius massacred, right after the calamitous battle, a number of Goths in the Roman army in Asia; this act seemed to Ammianus both *salutaris* and *prudens*.⁴ But despite this necessity to treat the barbarians with utmost suspicion, Ammianus did not see the battle as an insurmountable catastrophe – just a serious warning about the need for reform in his contemporary Roman state. For others, the safety of Rome was fatally compromised by religious or moral issues. To explain the defeat at Adrianople, accusations could usefully be directed at Valens, a dead Arian. Lenski (1997), studying the contemporary reactions to Adrianople, pointed out that both pagans and Nicene Christians could sympathise with personified accusations about Valens' religious persecution. For panegyrists, Theodosius' new rule provided an opportunity to proclaim that the reckoning was at hand for the insolent Goths – a claim that stood in a marked contrast with the emperor's search for compromise and the increased use of the *foederati* in the army.⁵

Moral considerations had for centuries been prone to surface in Roman rhetoric in times of conflict. The position of the emperor, quite naturally, came to assume a focal point in the *fortuna* of the Romans, which in Republican history was modulated by factional politics and competing family traditions.⁶ By Theodosius' reign, the ideology of imperial morals acting as the touchstone for supernatural help was wholly topical. It was extremely amenable to be transferred to Christian rhetoric, as well, and it should not be too surprising to find verbal or iconographic communication acts in the triumphalist register showcasing ostensibly classical elements. As noted by Faedo (1998, 324), triumphal monuments (or rhetoric) could incorporate references to pagan classics thanks to such gestures not being perceived as primarily religious in tone. Essentially, the reverence towards imperial victory operated on a parallel plane to Christian connotations, gradually developing from the imperial cult into the unique Byzantine conception of Christian empire, where the morality of the emperor was the supreme node of supernatural legitimation for Rome.⁷

The supernatural protection of the empire had become already around Theodosius' lifetime – and certainly afterwards – much more personalised in the figure of the living emperor in constant connection, through prayer and personal piety, to the Christian god. The controversy about the Altar of Victory demonstrates this, as well as the extent to which the previous symbolic framework had become eclipsed. As noted by Brown, the presence of the statue of Victory or even her altar in the Senate House was not repugnant to Gratian or Valentinian II as much as it was unnecessary. *Victoria* had become a guardian *comes* of the emperor, and this

³ Oros. *Hist.* 7.35.19: *quos utique perdidisse lucrum et vinci vincere fuit.*

⁴ Amm. Marc. 31.16.8. See Paschoud 1967, 44f. Ammianus' attitude may have something to do with his critique of his contemporaries' lack of historical perspective (Lenski 1997, 162; Kelly 2008, 282), an impression reinforced by his remark that a crucial component to Julius' plan – that all the commanders of the Gothic units were Romans – was a rare case *his temporibus*. That said, Ammianus' history includes many other instances of massacres of northerners being described in neutral or approving fashion: 16.11.9, 17.8.4, 17.13.13. Speidel 1998, comparing Ammianus with the parallel accounts in Eunapius and Zosimus, concludes that the killed Goths were probably not soldiers at all, but hostages killed in revenge for the defeat at Adrianople; Eunapius, similarly to Ammianus but via disingenuous rationale, wants to present these Goths as soldiers and hence preserve the Roman honour more intact (Speidel 1998, 506).

⁵ For the rhetorical programme seeking to portray the Gothic policies of Theodosius as a triumph: Heather 2010.

⁶ On the Republican competition between family traditions, see e.g. Rawson 1985, 12, 218f.,

⁷ McCormick 1986, 4, 13, 47f.; Takács 2009, 94-128.

link (dubbed ‘institutionalized egotism’ by Brown) was not in need of any external reinforcing.⁸ Soon after Theodosius’ victory at Frigidus, the idea that he had ascertained his victory by prayer alone began to take shape. Ambrose had used the theme of overcoming the enemy by prayer in his *Epistle* 51(15).6 from year 382/3, describing how bishop Acholius of Thessalonica effectuated *precibus suis* the departure of the Goths from Macedonia. The salvation of the city thus did not depend on the military.⁹ In his innovative blend of laudatory and homiletic tropes, the funerary-oration-cum-sermon *De obitu Theodosii*, Ambrose introduced the idea of Theodosius accosting God in a crucial moment of battle; this seems like the origin for the subsequently embellished versions in other authors, with Theodosius’ victory being directly caused by prayer.¹⁰ It will be seen below that the propaganda of Arcadius, Theodosius’ son, made use of the motif of ‘victory by prayer’ soon after year 400.

Hands-on *héracléisme* and the Arch of Theodosius

Even if prayers were thought to be the weapon of choice of the elderly Theodosius, well-established and increasingly celebrated as another Constantine, his early rule had been in dire need of other rhetorical highlights. But it was not only the Christian God that the Theodosian triumphalism could rely on. Hercules may have been a long-standing divine model to many emperors, but even then it might be expected that after Constantine, Christian emperors would have had less prominent iconographical recourse to the Herculean paradigm. This *prima facie* assumption would seem to be countered by the Herculean iconography that is strongly referenced in Theodosius’ arch at his Forum of Constantinople.¹¹

Here, it is worth making a brief detour to the preceding history of Hercules as an imperial collaborator. The relationship of Herculean mythical material with the expanding mental confines of the Mediterranean worldview have been noted on many occasions: it was thanks to these mythical links that Heracles-Hercules became associated with particular areas of the West, particularly the Iberian Peninsula.¹² He is also found as a very popular divinity in Gaul and the Germanic frontier provinces, with their military focus and an economy geared towards supporting the legions.¹³ In addition to these geographical linkages, Heracles-Hercules could be used as a metaphor for the relationship between the civilised peoples and the perceived destructive forces around them, which is what Dauge 1981 called *héracléisme*. Though Dauge’s treatment is overly schematic and structuralist in many ways, seeing real-life Greco-Roman interactions with ‘barbarian’ peoples modulated through the mythical *exemplum* of Hercules and his resistance to ‘titanic’ (*titanique*) forces

⁸ Brown 2012, 107.

⁹ See Lenski 1997, 134.

¹⁰ Ambr. *De ob. Theod.* 7. On inter-generic enrichment in Ambrose’s *sermo/laudatio*, see Moreau 2015. Further developments: Rufin. *HE* 2(11).16.33; Jer. *Ep.* 58.5; Gennad. *De viris ill.* 49; Socr. 5.25; Soz. 7.24. On these cf. Cameron 2011, 97, also noting that the same theme is already used by Eusebius and Nazarius about Constantine.

¹¹ Naumann 1976, 127, on the basis of Kosswig 1968. The excavations of Forum Tauri/Forum Theodosii (the modern Beyazit Meydanı) took a long time, from Casson and Talbot Rice in 1929 and Mamboury in 1936, to those between 1969 and 1973 which eventually unearthed the bases of the ‘peacock’ columns: see Croke 2010, 258f.

¹² Hercules’ association with Spain eventually goes back to a localisation of his cattle raid against Geryon (Hes. *Theog.* 289-294), though this episode of his cycle may have been first situated areas much closer to the Greek mainland, in Epirus: Hecat. Mil. *FGrH* 1 F 26 *ap. Arr. Anab.* 2.16.5; see Braun 2004, 287, 296-303. Hercules’ route to Geryon could also be adapted to incorporate Scythia: Hdt. 4.9-10; Diod. 2.43.3. Pliny *HN* 5.31 recognises the tendency of Greek myths to ‘wander around’ (*vagantibus Graeciae fabulis*).

¹³ On Hercules in Gaul (often imagined to have happened on his return from Iberia): Diod. 4.18.5, 19.1 (cf. 5.24.2f.), Dion. Hal. *AR* 14.1.4-5 (cf. *EtGud* s.v. Κελτική), Parth. *Narr.* 30, Timagenes *FGrH* 88 F 2 *ap. Amm.* 15.9.6, *EtMag* s.v. Κελτοί; Eust. *In Dionys. Per.* 281. Hercules in the *Germaniae*: particular attention has been paid to Hercules among the Batavi, e.g. in Roymans 2009. Practical benefits from Hercules’ mythical travels were obvious for the purposes of acculturation under the empire: he could be made to tie the genealogies of local groups to Greco-Roman past: see Heiden 1987, 663ff., Woolf 2011, 41f.; Lampinen 2013, 81f.

provides an adequate paradigm for analysing some symbolic aspects of especially Roman barbaromachic discourse.¹⁴

Hercules' role as 'le modèle paradigmatique de la guerre conduit, au nom de la civilisation, contre les Barbares' (Jourdain-Annequin 1992, 278) saw him represented as a smiter of barbarians already in Hellenistic depictions, often with Γαλάται (*Galatae*) as the enemies.¹⁵ This made him a useful model for ideal rulership and it was in this rhetorical exemplary role that he was often alluded to in Roman discourse. His symbolic status as the defender of civilization and the pacifier of barbarians could easily be adapted to the purposes of projecting imperial providentiality.¹⁶ These uses – as a guarantor of safety and a moral example for rulers – are linked with each other in many Imperial-era testimonia, and Hercules' significance for the self-fashioning of a series of emperors has recently been studied by Olivier Hekster, who for instance notes that combining different media (such as iconographic, literary, and rhetorical) to broadcast a 'legitimizing paradigm' in pre-modern power structures is a well-attested dynamic (2005, 209). It was in this mode that Dio Chrysostom, in his *Or. 1 περί βασιλείας*, furnished an elaborate allegory of Hercules making his famous choice between virtue and indulgence, and becoming the deliverer of mankind (83f.).¹⁷ Dio emphasises Herculean adversity to human tyrants instead of monstrous animals and beasts (seen, for instance, in Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus*), an emphasis which is almost certainly connected with the man Trajan served his earlier military career under the emperor Domitian.¹⁸

During the Gallic emperors there is some evidence for the use of Hercules as a talismanic guarantor of the Gallic and Germanic provinces, where he was a popular deity in his own right. The symbolism of Hercules could handily be projected both against the trans-Rhenane barbarians and the 'tyrannical' central Imperial oppression.¹⁹ Perhaps the most prominent case of a Later Imperial use of Hercules as a source of exemplarity and projection of an emperor's image stems likewise from Gaul, but from the time of the original tetrarchic arrangement, with Diocletian presented as 'Iovius' and Maximian as 'Herculius'.²⁰ The combination appeared effortlessly adaptable (with Zeus and Hercules being both immediately recognisable models for different aspects of ideal rulership, and – along Dauge's schema – the Romans as a 'race jupitérienne' practicing 'héracléisme' against forces of chaos²¹), but not without some uncomfortable implications. The 'Herculean' emperor (Maximian) could have decoded from the mythical paradigm the promise of ascending to the highest distinction after his energetic service, but to the 'Iovian' emperor (Diocletian) such a partnership entailed the uncomfortable feeling of sharing the supreme power. Additionally, the *exemplum* of Hercules as it was offered to Trajan by Pliny (*Pan. Lat. 1*) – retroactively making it clear that his travails under the 'tyrant' Domitian were but a test preceding his assumption of Jovian powers – would have been undoubtedly well studied by rhetorically trained members of the elite.

The *Panegyric of 289*, chronologically the second oldest piece in the collection *XII Panegyrici Latini*, is sometimes attributed to Mamertinus, probably the author of the following panegyric (that of 291). At the very least it seems that the Panegyrist of 289 was a native of Gaul. The speech is notable for promoting the

¹⁴ Dauge 1981, 33 with n. 82, 351, 542.

¹⁵ Such as the relief plate from Cyzicus (Istanbul Archaeological Museum inv. no. 564), from c. 277 BCE and depicting a Heracles-Hercules looming over a vanquished Celt; or the Aetolian coins showing Hercules smiting Galatae (Nachtergaele 1977, 48, 202f.).

¹⁶ Hercules as the *pacator* of barbarians, e.g. Diod. 4.19.1-2; Amm. 15.9.3-6.

¹⁷ The choice of Heracles, cf. Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.21; Cic. *Off.* 1.32.

¹⁸ On Sen. *HO* 1989-96.

¹⁹ See Rees 2005, 223f. In addition to the warlike virtues, particularly the *Germanicus Maximus V* coinage of Postumus (*RIC V.2* 129) was careful to include peaceful attributes of Hercules (e.g. *Pacifer*: *RIC V.2* 67, 135-136, 203-204), perhaps in order not to push too far the image of his rule as a perpetual military exercise. Even more Herculean are *RIC V.2* 331-333, where Postumus goes all the way that Trajan (e.g. *RIC II* 581, 695, 702; discussed in Hekster 2005, 205) and others had gone before him: combining the image of Hercules with a legend speaking only about the emperor, reinforcing the identification between the two.

²⁰ For the sobriquets, see Rees 2005; also Seston 1950, esp. 260-66.

²¹ Dauge 1981, 210, 231.

Herculean credentials of Maximian both in what it comes to taming the chaotic forces threatening Gaul, and in what nowadays would be called ‘soft power’. The latter, of course, may be present as a desire or wish for the future, guised as a giving of thanks. The undeniable feat of Maximian has been to quell the unrest in Gaul, the very purpose for which he was promoted by Diocletian, and this is used to construct a great Herculean feat out of what otherwise comes across as a peasant insurrection – whatever the true nature of ‘Bagaudic’ disturbances might have been.²² It may have been that the Gallic emperors’ reliance on Herculean symbolism partly guided the rhetorical choices of the Panegyrist of 289. As Roger Rees (2005, 43) points out, the *Panegyric* 10(2) assimilates some of the most common Gallic coin epithets of Hercules into the figure of Maximian, particularly those of *Invictus*, *Pacifer*, and *Virtus*. This is no doubt a considered choice from the part of the panegyrist, and may reflect a desire to reappropriate the Gallic allegiance to Hercules to serve the tetrarchic centralising project instead of provincial loyalties. Worth of note is also an apparent verbal allusion to Seneca’s *HO* 1989 (*domitor magne ferarum*) in Mamertinus’ *feras illas indomitasque gentes* (10(2).7.6).

Let us now return to Theodosius’ triumphal arch in Constantinople. The Forum Tauri, so named after the prefect Flavius Taurus cos. 361, was comprehensively redesigned and rededicated by Theodosius, and became known as Forum Theodosii. The ongoing scholarly debate regarding the exact dimensions of the forum and the location either at its eastern or western end of the apparently trifold triumphal arch astride the *Mesē* need not be a concern in this instance, as the discussion pertains to the iconography of the arch. In addition to the triumphal arch, the forum also held a carved spiral column similar to Trajan’s Column in Rome, although it was set up later, after 386.²³ The pillars of the triumphal arch, preserved in greater height among the *spolia* of the Basilica Cistern, are sometimes called ‘peacock-eyed columns’, but even a short inspection reveals that they bear a clear resemblance to the traditional artistic conventions of depicting tree branches, and especially Hercules’ club (ῥόπαλον), both as amulets and in larger sculptural pieces.²⁴

The metonymical reference to Hercules is even stronger, however; indeed it could be said to go beyond simple metonymy. Casson’s original excavations only unearthed blank drums of pillar capitals, but later, some of the capitals were found to have borne depictions of fingers – shown in the reconstruction of Rudolf Naumann (fig. 1).²⁵ Lucia Faedo devoted an article to the Herculean imagery of the triumphal arch and its connections to Theodosian and earlier imperial triumphal programmes, but the explanations she offered for the motivations behind the monument will benefit from re-examination and refinement. The suggestion of Janin (1964, 66) that the giant hands holding clubs would have been meant as a warning to those on the forum who were intent on fraud, is creative but unconvincing: Hercules was not known for smiting swindlers. The dating of the whole monumental complex is debated, but the construction may have begun as early as 380.²⁶

²² Particularly *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).4.3: *cum militaris habitus ignari agricolae appetiverunt, cum arator peditem, cum pastor equitem, cum hostem barbarum suorum cultorum rusticus vastator imitatus est?* It may not be a coincidence that the Panegyrist seems happier to extoll Maximian’s trans-Rhenane feats (Nixon 1990, 20).

²³ *Cons. Cplitana s.a.* 386; *Marc. Com. s.a.* 386. See Becatti 1960, 83-150; Janin 1964, 81f.; Berger 2000, 167f.; Croke 2010, 259.

²⁴ Among sculptural pieces, to give just some prominent examples, the club of the Capitoline Hercules (Musei Capitolini inv. no. 1265) bears a distinct resemblance, as does the one carried by Commodus-as-Hercules in the same institution (MC1120), and the Hercules in Musei Vaticani (Pio Clementino inv. no 252). Kosswig 1968, 260 adds the example of Farnese Hercules. A good example of the usage in amulets and other smaller pieces is presented in Alföldi 1949, esp. 21, though his further speculation on *interpretatio Romana* and ‘native’ British practices has not aged well.

²⁵ Kosswig 1968, 259, with a tentative identification with Herculean imagery; Naumann 1976, with the relevant reconstructions on 128, 131. He does not dwell in the detail of hands; neither does he elaborate on the further symbolism of the Herculean clubs.

²⁶ Faedo 1998, 327.

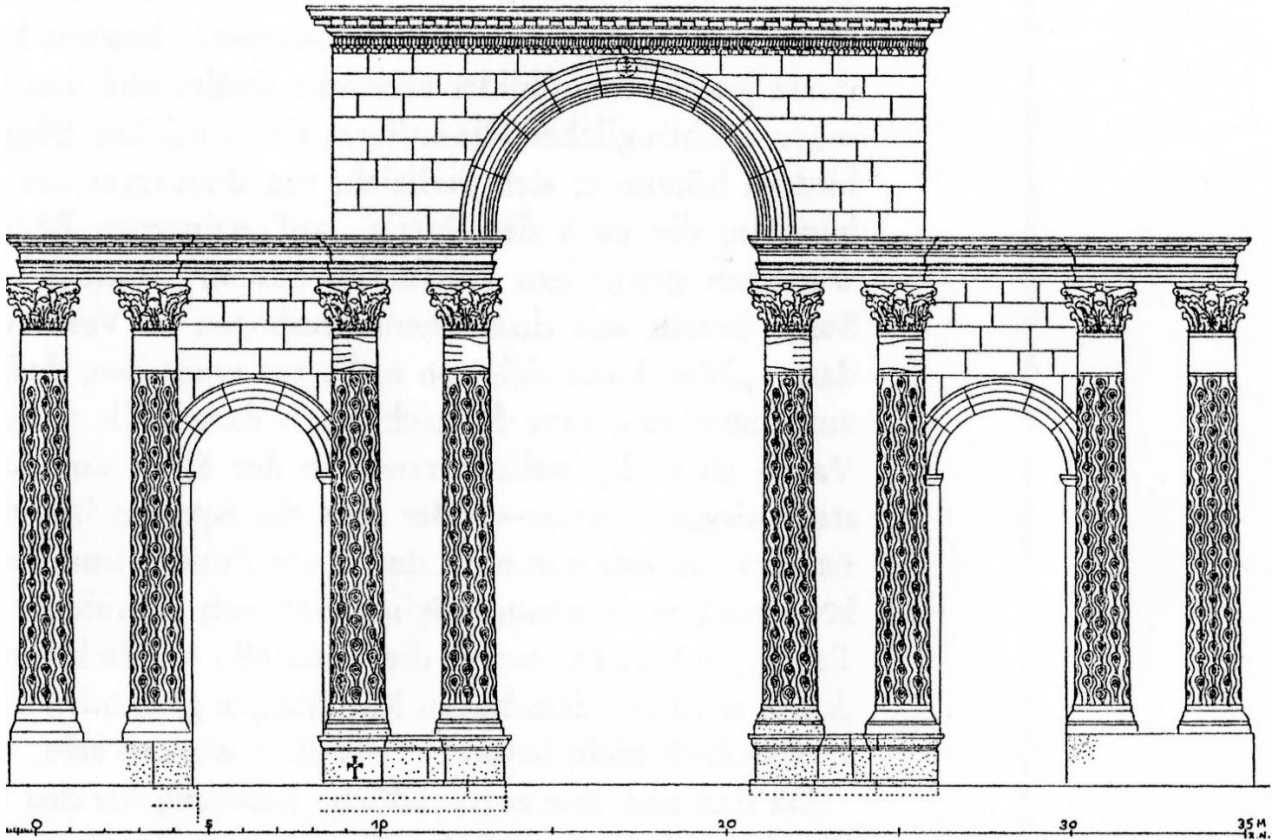


Fig. 1. Theodosius' Arch as reconstructed in Naumann 1976.

Theodosius' harking back to Hercules is perhaps surprising in an emperor who has occasionally in earlier scholarship been characterised as a fanatical Christian and who traditionally has been regarded as the ruler who decisively consolidated Christian worship while rooting out pagan cults. These views have recently been modulated by Cameron.²⁷ But significantly, Theodosius was also a Spanish-born military emperor with a penchant for cultivating connections to his compatriot Trajan, who as we have seen considered Hercules as his personal deity. This Spanish connection between Trajan and Theodosius' own home area, where Hercules was a popular (as well as mythically projected) presence, has been the standard interpretation of the Herculean iconographic references of the arch.²⁸ Such an allusion is certainly part of the rationale behind the monument, but as will be shown below, is not the whole story. *Héracléisme* could also be made to carry implications about a ruler's predecessor and his enemies. The latter aspect shall be explored slightly later. As for the first point, it was noted above how Dio Chrysostom employed Hercules in his *First Discourse on Kingship*, a rhetorical theme surely influenced by Trajan's special relationship with the hero-deity and the potential this set-up had for contrasting the active, military ruler with the despot ruling before him. Valens could have been a similar presence to Theodosius' reign as Domitian was to Trajan in Dio's view. But in its iconographical dimension, the Theodosian *héracléisme* was an ambitiously allusive programme of *imitatio*.

²⁷ Cameron 2011, e.g. 56f. making clear that Theodosius was not bound by religious sentiments in choosing his administrators; 60-72 refuting some of the conventional accusations of Christian fanaticism against Theodosius. Also Cameron 2011, 228 on the 'pagan' elements in the panegyrics given to Theodosius late in 389.

²⁸ The Herculean iconography has been the main focus of interpretations: Croke 2010, 259. On Theodosius' allusions to Trajan and Hadrian, his Spanish predecessors: Faedo 1998, 321.

Trajan had cultivated the associations to Hercules even in his coinage. *RIC* II.581, from the mint of Rome, depicts on its reverse Hercules' club, standing upon a base draped in the Nemean lion skin.²⁹



Fig. 2. Trajan's AE as, *RIC* II.581.

It is by no means impossible that the design of the pillars in the arch of Theodosius was directly influenced by the Trajanic coin design, since there would have been examples of previous imperial coinage available. The *Epitome de Caesaribus* explicitly mentions that Theodosius tracked his ancestry back to Trajan (*Epit.* 48.1) and was similar to his predecessor both in manners and bodily build when compared with old depictions and descriptions (48.8); it also includes the detail that Theodosius was greatly interested in history.³⁰ Moreover, Theodosius was commemorated in close connection with Trajan also in Old Rome: it is known from *ILS* 2945 that Sextus Aurelius Victor, during his tenure *praefectus urbis Romae* (probably in 389), had erected a statue of Theodosius on the Forum of Trajan. The legitimising potential of such links is obvious, and it is probably safe to conclude that Victor, in monumentalising Theodosius' link to Trajan, gave a physical manifestation to official propaganda.³¹ It is also undoubtedly significant that Theodosius' accession and early reign were to a great extent associated with the Gothic menace: both literary and geographical connections made it easy to associate them with Trajan's Dacian adversaries.³² Interestingly, Trajan had also been evoked as an *exemplum* by Decius, who adopted the name *Traianus* quite soon after his accession, when preparing to respond to the threat of the Goths towards Dacia and the Balkans. Geography, in interaction with history, could easily become a trigger for *exempla*.

If the Theodosian theatrics of power in New Rome are interpreted in the light of his propagandistic need for capacious symbolic referents, the Triumphal Way – with its progression from the direction of Thrace and Danube, through the triumphal arch displaying the metonymic *ρόπαλα* of Hercules, to the centre of the city – served as an arena of suitably multivalent semiotics.³³ Theodosius was probably the first emperor after the death of Constantine to be both securely based in Constantinople for most of his rule and to have the

²⁹ The coin may bear some relationship to slightly earlier monumentalised depictions of Hercules' club with an associated lion-skin, found in the city of Rome: Faedo 1998, 318f.

³⁰ *Epit. de Caes.* 48.11: *sagax plane multumque diligens ad noscenda maiorum gesta*.

³¹ Cf. Cameron 2011, 630f.; Victor's usefulness to Theodosius would probably been one reason for his promotion to positions normally inaccessible to a man of comparatively humble origins (Cameron 2011, 359). The likeliest dating of Victor's praefecture follows the suggestions of Cameron (2011, 519) based upon Chastagnol (1962, 232).

³² Cf. Errington 2006, 146. On Goths as *Getae*: Jer. *QH* 10; Oros. 1.6.2; SHA *M. Ant.* 10.6; Jord. *Get.* 40-2, 58; *ICUR* De Rossi ii.13 p. 100, 49 p. 106; Steph. Byz. s.v. Σκύθαί.

³³ On the Triumphal Way, see Mango 2000; 179 on the Theodosian era's significance for its monumentalisation and elaboration.

ambition and opportunity to extensively refashion the capital to reflect his propaganda.³⁴ He may also have been, during his early reign, desperate for legitimation and credibility alike.³⁵ To commission a triumphal arch was in the wake of the Gothic humiliations a potentially risky endeavour, but the panegyrics of the age, likewise, seem to support the view of an intense yearning for security and tutelage over the Empire's fates.³⁶ The same need for assurance, albeit in a cultural sphere, has been noted by Heather (2010, 187) to stand behind Themistius' *Oratio* 15; he also sees Themistius in this speech as propagating for the regime according to a prior plan (191). This is entirely plausible and is reinforced by the speech's sweeping critique of Valens. It also seems that Themistius was in a purposeful way emulating the example set by Dio in his speeches to Trajan.³⁷

Celebration of Gaïnas' fall as a manipulated triumph of the imperial providence

The factional strife and internal conflict in the East in the years 399 to 401, often associated with the rise and fall of Gaïnas, the Arian *magister utriusque militiae*, has been studied extensively. Wolf Liebeschuetz has detected in the events one of the "only two really violent outbursts of hostility" against Germanic barbarians in high positions within the empire.³⁸ Here, however, it is important to note that anti-Germanic rhetoric should not be straightforwardly equated with anti-Germanic sentiment. It could be argued that the fall of Gaïnas was part of the struggle for supremacy between the Eastern Roman army and the palace faction.³⁹

Gaïnas was a Gothic career soldier who, having probably fought at Frigidus in the Theodosian army, enjoyed quick advancement after the murder of Rufinus (395) and during the rule from behind the scenes by the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* Eutropius. His appointment as *MVM* (399) to quell the uprising of Gothic *foederati* under Tribigild, his joining of forces with these Goths, his wresting of control from Eutropius and his subsequent brief supremacy in Constantinople were covered by several ancient sources (some no longer extant), and have received considerable scholarly attention.⁴⁰ The 'Goths' were expelled by the insurgency of the Constantinopolitans, and Gaïnas' troops were defeated later in the Balkans. That the army's domination of the capital (and the emperor) proved to be short-lived was probably due to the sheer number of opponents such a disruption engendered. The archbishop of the city John Chrysostom and the empress formed the (far from unified) backbone of the palace faction, and especially the latter could manipulate the Constantinopolitan populace through his sermons. The backlash against Gaïnas could also rely on other sections of the army, commanded by other Gothic-born career soldiers who stood to gain from his ousting.⁴¹

John Chrysostom, it seems, became involved in the events only after Gaïnas made a request to have a church within the city walls for the use of the Arian Goths.⁴² While Gaïnas backed off from the ensuing impasse,

³⁴ Croke 2010, 241f., 263f. noting that in the absence of military victories, Constantinople became Theodosius' 'battlefield'. This turn came to have historical significance for Byzantium as Theodosius' sons stuck with his example.

³⁵ As Heather 2010, 185 notes, Theodosius' inaction regarding the Gothic situation posed a serious question to his legitimacy, since his original mandate had been to furnish a co-ordinated response to the post-Adrianople crisis. For more on Theodosius' precarious position during his first years, Heather 2010, 192f., 199.

³⁶ Kulikowski 2022, 77-79 on Theodosius' treaty of 382 with the Goths, and the associated disingenuous rhetoric.

³⁷ Faedo 1998, 321, 323.

³⁸ Liebeschuetz 1998, 137, with the fall of Stilicho furnishing the other example.

³⁹ Cameron and Long 1993, 9f., 224f., 335, noting that influence over the emperor was the ultimate prize in the deadly competition.

⁴⁰ Ancient sources: Synes. *Reg.* (before Gaïnas' downfall), *Prov.* (though heavily allegorized); Euseb. Schol. *Gaïn. ap. Socr.* 6.6, *Soz.* 8.4; and Eunapius, who was used by Philostorg. *ap. Phot. Bibl. cod.* 40, *Socr.* 6.6, Theodor. *HE* 5.32-3, *Soz.* 8.4, *Zos.* 5.7-21, and John of Antioch (esp. *F* 190 *ap. Exc. de ins.* 80). Minor attestations in *Jord. Rom.* 320, *Get.* 176; *Chron. Marcell. s.a.* 399-401. Modern studies: Burns 1994, 162-174; Cameron and Long 1993 esp. 109-126 on Synesius; also extensively Liebeschuetz 1990, 111-125.

⁴¹ A good example of such a figure would be Fravitta, who was made a consul as a reward for his victory over Gaïnas (*Zos.* 5.21.6; *Soc.* 6.6.39; *Soz.* 8.4.21), but fell from grace before 404 and possibly as early as late 401 (Liebeschuetz 1990, 123).

⁴² John Chrys. *Homil. cum Saturn. et Aurel.* 3.413; Theodor. *HE* 5.32 on Gaïnas' petition and Chrysostom's answer. In a clash before the emperor himself, the 'Scythian' is said to have terrified Arcadius, who almost acquiesces to Gaïnas' request before being

tensions in the city continued to foment and it is likely that anti-Arian (or anti-Gothic) demagoguery was partly to blame. Chrysostom's sermons convey an urge to 'purify' the body politic, and religious sentiments also seem to be partly subsumed under the classicizing allusions to earlier literature in the allegorical account of Synesius' *De providentia*.⁴³ The emphasis on religious elements in the tradition of the expulsion of the Goths was probably heightened both by political motivations immediately following the 'victory over the barbarians', and by the epic form adopted by at least one early narrator of the circumstances, Eusebius Scholasticus.⁴⁴ Included among political motivations should be the desire on the part of the imperial faction to highlight the martial credentials and triumphalistic providentiality of the markedly non-military emperor Arcadius. As often in Late Imperial references to barbarians, form overrides content.

Cameron and Long (1993, 202f.) note that since all extant sources on Gaïnas' fate (except Synesius) postdate Alaric's sack of Rome in 410, the implicit assumption in their hindsight was that as a Goth, Gaïnas had intended to sack the New Rome. Socrates of Constantinople considered Gaïnas and his faction to be enemies of both the Church and the State. Gaïnas breaks his side of a mutual vow with emperor Arcadius to refrain from plotting, and intends to spread carnage to the whole of the realm: the emperor, by contrast, is described as εὐορκός τις ἀνὴρ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο θεοφιλῆς. Later, when Gaïnas tries to confiscate some silver sold in the city, the occupation of Constantinople by his retainers reaches a point of crisis and shortly afterwards, his ousting is initiated through divine intervention by 'a multitude of angels in the form of huge armed men'.⁴⁵ In Synesius' contemporary but allegorical account, the 'Scythian' barbarians are attacked by outbreaks of panic during the day, and their general (Gaïnas) suffers from nightly terrors caused by Corybantes. As the Goths are described wandering around the town in alternating states of rage and horror, it is difficult not to compare this element to the debilitating panic attack that seizes the Celts when they attack Delphi.⁴⁶ The classicizing motif seems to be Synesius' substitute for what the church historians describe as Gaïnas feigning demonic possession and leaving the city for the Church of St. John at Hebdomon (Socr. 6.6; Soz. 8.4).

While genuine religious sentiments may have played their part in the calamitous resolution of the 'Gothic problem' under Arcadius – or, more cynically, the ousting of one faction by another – it is safer to say that religious rhetoric was used as a legitimating device. Of interest at this particular occasion, however, are the modes of iconographic triumphalism chosen in the wake of Gaïnas' fall, as Arcadius' court sought to monumentalise this victory and represent it as a glorious barbarian victory instead of an internal *putsch*.⁴⁷ Soon after Gaïnas' downfall, Arcadius ordered the erection of a victory column to commemorate it, with friezes in the manner of Trajan's column in Rome commemorating the Gothic victory as one obtained over

reassured by Chrysostom's arguments. Gaïnas argues that the request is only a proper reward for his services, but the bishop reminds him that compared to his old situation north of the Ister, his whole position should be reward enough (see Doležal 2006, 172). Behind the whole request was *CTh* 16.5.6 from year 381, by which Theodosius had banned Arian worship within the city walls.

⁴³ John Chrys. *Hom. in Acta apostt.* 37 *PG* 60.266-7; on medical imagery in the homiletics of this age, see Mayer 2015. Chrysostom never condemns the ensuing massacre of the Goths in their church (Burns 1994, 173). Palladius of Galatia's *Vita* of Chrysostom hushes up the whole Gaïnas-episode, so it may have reflected badly upon the archbishop: Liebeschuetz 1990, 119-120.

⁴⁴ Socr. 6.6 notes that Eusebius' four books on the subject in heroic meter ensured great fame for him.

⁴⁵ Socr. 6.6; also Philostorg. 11.8 *ap. Phot. Bibl. cod.* 40; Soz. 8.4; Socrates mentions the episode (6.5), but the sequence of events is different. Cf. van Nuffelen 2004, 296; Liebeschuetz 1990, 113, n. 12 remarks that the attack on the silversmiths and the palace seem like elements taken from Eusebius' *Gainias*—indeed, the topicality of the barbarian greed for metals would fit this suggestion.

⁴⁶ Synes. *Prov.* 116b-c; cf. Paus. 10.23.7. The use of allusion would partly account for the fact (considered baffling by Cameron and Long 1993, 215) that Synesius did not need to explain the reason for the barbarians' fear.

⁴⁷ Gaïnas is still portrayed as having a 'homeland' and reinforcements beyond the borders of the realm (Socr. 6.6, Soz. 8.4; also implied in Zos. 5.21). The classicizing ethnonym of 'Scythians' would have helped in this outcasting: Theod. 5.32 calls Gaïnas 'a Scythian, but of even more barbarous disposition'; Gaïnas is also called Scythian by John of Antioch (*F* 212.3 *Mariev ap. Exc. de ins.* 79).

barbarians.⁴⁸ Set up in a forum on the lower slopes of Xerolophus and thus preceding the Forum Bovis and the Forum Theodosii when progressing along the Mesē from west to east, the column's frieze cast the themes of providential imperial victory in an entirely conventional iconographic form and uses them to highlight the piety of Arcadius – perhaps partly as a way to circumvent his obvious inaction in the field.⁴⁹ The massacre of Goths is left out entirely – as it would not have suited the idea of the θεοφιλῆς emperor gaining a victory through piety and prayer.⁵⁰

The column on the whole may have been inspired by Theodosius' so-called 'Gothic column' set on the First Hill, an early monument (379/80: Croke 2010, 258) not devoid of inherent references to Trajan, and probably connected with the announcement, in November of 379, of Theodosius' (manufactured) victories over Goths, Alans and Huns.⁵¹ Later, under Arcadius' son Theodosius II, a statue of the emperor was added to the Arcadian column.⁵² As iconographic propaganda, its recasting of a civilian massacre and a division within the Roman army as a providential imperial victory was wrought with political pitfalls, which is probably why the imagery in the column completely omitted the fighting in the city, which the church historians report (Liebeschuetz 1990, 121). Grigg 1977, while not favouring the theory that the image program of the column refers to the overthrow of Gaïnas, and instead explaining it as a iconography of harmony among the sons of Theodosius, supported the idea that the monument developed further the nascent imagery of imperial Christian providentiality. He connects the *SALVS ORIENTIS FELICITAS OCCIDENTIS* coinage (between 400 and 404) to a peaceful program of imperial *concordia* (478), but it would also be possible to see the *Salus* as linked to the expulsion of the barbarians and re-establishment of the palace faction under the leadership of the empress Aelia Eudoxia, Arcadius' consort.⁵³

Eunapius' much-discussed fragment 68 mentions how in the aftermath of the expulsion of the Goths, a prefect (ἑπαρχος) either called or nicknamed Perses put up either in Rome or in Constantinople a display of paintings which upset at least the historian himself with its alleged lack of traditional elements and the inclusion of innovation.⁵⁴ He accuses Perses of belittling the whole victory over the barbarians, with no reference to the bravery of the emperor or of the soldiers, nor any depiction of a proper battle. Instead, a hand extending from a cloud was depicted, with writing next to the hand explaining it as the hand of God smiting the barbarians, and further giving the explanation of 'barbarians fleeing God'.⁵⁵ Essentially, Eunapius seems to represent a traditionalist (and possibly pagan) backlash at an iconographical innovation which seemed to go against the conventions of a victory centred on the person of the emperor. He may also have bristled against what he perceived as an overly Christian imagery when depicting a subject – the victory over

⁴⁸ On the column see Becatti 1960, 151-264; McCormick 1986, 49f., 52-55 with figures; Liebeschuetz 1990, 273-278; Burns 1994, 174 and 348, n. 118; Cameron and Long 1993, 238. Whether the main 'Trajanising' element was the frieze or the internal staircase, has been debated; Beckmann 2002, 353, for instance, considers the spiral staircase to have been the distinguishing feature.

⁴⁹ Liebeschuetz 1990, 113, n. 13 with bibliography; Errington 2006, 146. Emulation of Theodosian depictions is also a probable factor behind the iconographic choices.

⁵⁰ In certain ways, the column's classicising iconography can act as a parallel to Eusebius Scholasticus' traditionalist war epic *Gaïnias*. It may, however, be that Eusebius' poem was completed before the 'official version' of Arcadius' column was revealed, and hence ended up giving more of a role to violent action against barbarians: Liebeschuetz 1990, 120ff.

⁵¹ These early Theodosian efforts to fabricate an imperial victory were called 'almost frenzied' by McCormick 1986, 41.

⁵² *Chron. Pasch. s.a.* 421 Dindorf 1832, 579.

⁵³ Cameron and Long 1993, 247 are adamant in associating this with Gaïnas' ousting. The purifying rhetoric is present both in Synesius and in John Chrysostom: Cameron and Long 1993, 97-99. Synes. *Prov.* 114d-115a on how 'those in power' (i.e. Gaïnas' faction) tamper with the correct religious rituals, which leads to the expulsion of 'the Giants, that is the aliens'. Synesius represents these monsters driven away with thunderbolts from polluting the air with their godless breath (ἀέρα καθήρωμεν μεμολυσμένον ἐκ τῆς ἀναπνοῆς τῶν ἀθέων [...] τὰ γὰρ τοιαῦτα τῶν τεράτων ἡμεῖς πυρπολοῦντες καὶ καταβροντῶντες ἐλαύνομεν).

⁵⁴ On the insecure and variously interpreted attributions of the prefect Perses and the city of his tenure: Cameron and Long 1993, 218-222, ending up favouring assumptions that the reference is to a Constantinopolitan official (218) possibly named or nicknamed Perses, or else Hormisdas, a turncloak son of the Persian king (222), and the barbarians are the soldiers of Gaïnas being driven from Constantinople (219).

⁵⁵ Eunap. F 68 Blockley *ap. Exc. de sent.* 72: ἀνδρείαν μὲν γὰρ βασιλέως καὶ ῥώμην στρατιωτῶν ἢ πόλεμον ἐμφανῆ καὶ νόμιμον οὐδαμοῦ τὰ γραφόμενα παρεδήλου καὶ συνηνίττετο [...] θεοῦ χειρὶ ἐλαύνουσα τοὺς βαρβάρους [...] βάρβαροι τὸν θεὸν φεύγοντες.

the emperor's enemies – that until then had remained largely untouched by Christianising iconographic innovation.

The hand of providential deity smiting barbarians seems to connect the panels described by Eunapius not only to the arch of Theodosius I, but also to the broader iconographic developments of the age. The hand of God (*manus Dei*) as an iconographic device has literary antecedents even in the Bible, which naturally would have influenced Judeo-Christian depictions – perhaps the most famous among which are the frescoes at the synagogue of Dura-Europos.⁵⁶ Even so, there is no reason to disqualify some influence from the Greco-Roman pictorial conventions, particularly the representations of *Victoria* hovering over or holding a wrath above the imperial personage. It is a moot point from which side the 4th and early 5th century occurrences of the *manus* eventually derive: this should certainly be regarded as another instance of conveniently vague symbolic referents. Exactly around the year 400, the motif begins to appear more regularly in imperial iconography: Aelia Eudoxia's coinage is another good example.⁵⁷ Even so, as noted by Doyle (2015, 169), the winged victory was such a powerful symbol of imperial providence that it did remain in use in coinage.

Arcadius was undeniably much less of a military man than his father. Partly for this reason, the idea of the emperor effectuating victories over barbarians (or usurpers) simply by his prayers would have appeared well suited for his propaganda. It would appear that in seeking to curry imperial favour by celebrating the expulsion of Gaïnas' party, the prefect Perses furnished a display whose iconography – disdained by Eunapius – aimed to make a reference to Theodosius' iconography of the divine *manus*, but with even more open-ended religious signification. The triumphal depictions set up in this unofficial (as Cameron and Long 1993, 218-22 surmise) context took advantage of an unconventional pictorial motif that had only recently been adopted to imperial use via coinage, although its Judeo-Christian forebears were relatively well-established. That the triumphalist register was clearly what Perses was after, is backed by the localization of the display on the arena.⁵⁸

Any help is welcome: the benefits of Theodosian capacious triumphalism

Let us return to Theodosius and his iconography, which clearly stand behind the specimens of Arcadian triumphalism, although the two had different reasons to be wilfully ambiguous in their semantics. Certainly, the Christianisation of the empire and the imperial semantics of power and victory had developed greatly during Theodosius' rule. Burns adequately notes that the column of Arcadius was an attempt to live up to the legends of his father; likewise, it is true that Arcadius "had no real victories over foreign enemies to celebrate".⁵⁹ But neither had Theodosius during his early years – although he had been elevated to purple precisely to stabilise the situation after Adrianople. On the other hand, Arcadius was a legitimately established ruler benefiting from the stability and prestige of his father's rule. His court was able to fabricate the martial associations he needed to fulfil the triumphalist expectations of a divinely protected emperor. The lack of military success under Theodosius' early rule, however, had been a much more serious deficit. Trajanic references and the associations with Hercules that were commonplace in Hispania may come some way towards explaining the presence of Herculean iconography in Theodosius' Arch, but the motivations

⁵⁶ On the *manus* as a Late Antique motif of divine action: McCormick 1987, 96. Cameron 2011, 740 also notes that the *manus* in the famous Munich Ascension Panel can be compared with the ancestral hands welcoming a 'pagan' grandee to heaven in the so-called 'Consecratio Ivory'; hence, the heavenly hand should not be regarded as an iconographic device with rigid religious affiliations.

⁵⁷ *RIC* X.14, 32 on a solidus of Aelia Eudoxia; further on e.g. X.256 on a solidus of Aelia Eudocia, consort to Theodosius II. The emergence of the motif was tied by MacIsaac 1975 into Judeo-Christian iconographical tradition, but his strong rejection of classical influences and the simplistic view that the theme is linked to Theodosius' decisive consolidation of 'Christianity's victory' (323) should now be compared with the more balanced treatment by Doyle 2015, more open to the motif's relationship with *Victoria*, who nonetheless continued to be used in other contexts, for instance in Honorius' coins (169).

⁵⁸ The *fercula* are commented upon in McCormick 1986, 92-96.

⁵⁹ Burns 1994, 348, n. 118.

behind this choice can be understood even better when the context of his accession and early rule are studied in the light of the literary evidence.

In Ammianus' view, Valens had been an undeserving emperor, and *Fortuna* had directed the barbarians to attack Rome on that account.⁶⁰ It was crucial for Valens' successor Theodosius to appear to safeguard orthodoxy and correct morality in a climate where a sizable portion of the empire's elite – either 'pagans' or Christians – could in any case accuse the emperor of not being able to recover the supernatural favour. Gratian reacted to the defeat at Adrianople by issuing an act of toleration (Socr. 5.2.1; Soz. 7.1.3), which certainly was motivated by the possibility of an obvious pagan argument that Christianity had led to the loss of Rome's supernatural favour.⁶¹ Some Christian viewpoints tended to see Adrianople as the beginning of the end for the empire, but concurrently there was a vigorous tradition of panegyrics professing to foresee opportunities of revenge by the monarch to whom each speech was dedicated (see Lenski 1997, 163). The hectic issuing of edicts and exhortations that Theodosius began immediately after assuming the purple signify a dire need to establish his legitimacy and secure the loyalty of the most important sections of society.⁶²

Themistius' *Oratio* 15 was delivered in January 381 on Theodosius' invitation and in his presence. As Peter Heather notes (2010, 189), the speech uses warlike rhetoric simply by way of bracketing in the main contents, which in themselves bear some similarity to Dio's *Discourses on Kingship* – a topical subject when addressing a new emperor. By claiming that Theodosius delights more in peace than in war, and that the time was not yet ripe to wage war against the 'Scythians (185b-c), Themistius is able to gloss over Theodosius' inaction regarding the Gothic menace which he had been elevated to combat. Thus it represents a *volte-face* in Themistius' arguments in comparison to *Oratio* 14, from right after Theodosius' elevation, in which he had anticipated an immediate vengeance to be dealt upon the Goths. It must have been obvious to many of the emperor's critics that this was a deft turnaround in tone, but as Heather points out (2010, 204) the propagandistic gamble seems to have succeeded, judging by the lack of challengers to Theodosius' rule in the east. The merits of Theodosius' peace treaty (in October 382) with the Goths are extolled in Themistius' *Oratio* 16, given in January 383; in another example of juggling multiple meanings and hazy but unmistakably providential signifiers, the spin given to the celebrations seems to have aimed to make them appear as close to military triumph as possible.⁶³

Theodosius' religious politics should not be seen in the anachronistic light of retrospect: as Errington 2006 and Cameron 2011 have argued, this reputedly staunchly Christian emperor cannot be demonstrated to have furthered a consistently anti-pagan agenda; nor can the ferocious rhetoric of some of his legislation be regarded as a straightforward reflection of concrete actions against paganism.⁶⁴ Many modern scholars have tended to take the denunciations of pagan and heretic practices in the Theodosian legislation at face value, but Cameron has rightly called into question the extent of their practical enforcement (2011, 73). For the Christian historians weaving their teleological narratives about of the conversion of the empire, Theodosius

⁶⁰ Amm. 31.1.1, foreshadowed in 29.2.20. A Livian reference is possible: cf. Liv. 5.36.6 *ibi iam urgentibus Romanam urbem fatis*.

⁶¹ That the act of toleration was clearly a temporary measure is supported by the observation of Garnsey 1984, 20 that the act was annulled by *CTH* 16.5.5 already in 379. See also Lenski 1997, 145-160.

⁶² Williams and Friell 1995, 28-33.

⁶³ On *Oratio* 16, see Pavan 1964, 19-22, McCormick 1986, 42.

⁶⁴ Errington 2006, 212-259; Cameron 2011 reassesses the testimonies to Theodosius' alleged religious partisanship: 56f. making clear that Theodosius was primarily motivated by political and fiscal expediency, trying to work with the elites in both West and East regardless of their creed; 59-74 presents a minimalist-realist interpretation of Theodosius' legislation against paganism; also cf. 798 on his praetorian prefect Maternus Cynegius' less than vaunted energy in dismantling temples (also McLynn 2005, 111-119). The earlier study by Williams and Friell 1995 encapsulates well the old-fashioned interpretation of Theodosius as a 'devout Nicaean' (52), explicitly based upon Christian sources. One might note that not even an emperor who usually has been seen as the epitome of harmful Christian partisanship, Valens, was blind to the benefits of working with representatives of other confessions: Roberts 2008, 3ff.

came across as the most credible figure for an emperor whose orthodoxy never came under doubt, and under whose rule the Nicene creed had finally become firmly entrenched. The notional parallelism between Theodosius and Constantine seems to have appealed also to pagan writers, as noted by Cameron regarding Eunapius' hostile view of both (2011, 655). No doubt the Edict of Thessalonica would have reinforced such a view from the very beginning, notwithstanding the practical actions of Theodosius.

Theodosius' acts during his first year of rule, shoring up the official position of Nicene Christianity both by the Edict of Thessalonica (February 380) and his swift intervention on behalf of the anti-Arians, should first and foremost be interpreted as crisis measures designed to dissociate the current emperors from the Arianism of Valens and the implied risk of military defeat.⁶⁵ Theodosius' entrance to Constantinople in November 380, sourly noted by Zosimus' (4.33.1) source Eunapius to have been in an undeserved semblance of a triumph, took place in an atmosphere of considerable unease caused by the Goths.⁶⁶ Theodosius was a Western-born military man and the son of a discredited generalissimus, but he had not been able to erase the threat they posed, which made the justification of his rule very tenuous.⁶⁷ In the military sphere, it can be suggested that he soon realised the necessity of relying on barbarian *foederati* in order to consolidate the waning Roman military record, even as Roman barbarophobic sentiments had been inflamed by Adrianople and its aftermath.⁶⁸ This was tricky terrain to traverse successfully. Especially at the beginning of his reign Theodosius would have needed to address sizable sections of Roman society (and army) who were not yet Christians, but whose collaboration was nonetheless crucial for him. Moreover, along the lines set out by Cameron and others, it might be advisable to avoid generalising assumptions even as for the situation by the end of his reign. Theodosius' *héracléisme* being dependent on the vulnerability of his early reign and the historical *exempla* adapted to suit the Gothic threat were not taken into account by Faedo in her otherwise rich study: instead she related the *ρόπαλον* pillars with Theodosius' war against Magnus Maximus in 388 and probably overestimated Themistius' practical influence on the pictorial programme.⁶⁹

Theodosius' forum was a 'distinctive space' where his regime's visual and allusive propaganda held sway.⁷⁰ Just like Theodosius' triumphal arch incorporated powerfully metonymic symbols of a pagan military divinity into its iconography, so does the epigram in the pediment of the emperor's equestrian statue in the same forum contain similarly classicising allusions to non-Christian providentiality. The hexameter piece by an unknown epigrammatist, preserved in the Planudean section of *Anthologia Palatina*, celebrates Theodosius as a 'second sun' (ἥλιος ἄλλος), rising from the east and shedding light to the mortals and holding the Ocean at his feet.⁷¹ This dedication and the equestrian statue, however, date from only two years before Theodosius' death – indeed from the time he was preparing to march against Eugenius in the west. This is no doubt the significance of him 'rising from the east' (ἐκθορες ἀντολίηθε). As with Themistius' orations, the emphasis of such thoroughly propagandistic programmes would certainly have left parts of the audience unconvinced, though perhaps quiescent. From the remains of Theodosius' triumphal arch, it can be deduced that the continued use of classicising elements in iconographic depictions was not welcomed by everyone: the base of one of the *ρόπαλον* pillars carries the addition of a Christian cross, possibly meant to counteract

⁶⁵ On Gregory of Nazianzus and Theodosius: McLynn 2010 *passim*, and on the respective constructions of Theodosius' image by Themistius and Gregory, McLynn 2010, 239; on the Council of Constantinople, McLynn 2010, 232-239. That Theodosius' religious initiatives were designed to establish his (Christian) credentials and legitimate his rule: McLynn 2010, especially 238 on the absence among his motivations of narrow factionalism; also Heather 2010, 188, 194-199.

⁶⁶ See Williams and Friell 1995, 32 on the campaigns of 380, which hardly merited a triumph.

⁶⁷ Matthews 1971 examines the western support base and allies of Theodosius. Heather 2010, 197 on the acute lack of legitimisation that troubled Theodosius' early reign. Also cf. Croke 2010, 243.

⁶⁸ Cf. Williams and Friell 1995, 31, 34f. This is supported by Heather 2010, 202, observing that Themistius' *Or.* 15, if it reflects the emperor's views (as it probably does), points to a policy of seeking a peace deal with the Goths already in January 381.

⁶⁹ Faedo 1998, 327. It is difficult to see how Hercules would have been a necessary divine and symbolic support for an already well-established eastern emperor setting out to restore the rightful ruler Valentinian II to the western throne.

⁷⁰ Croke 2010, 259f.

⁷¹ *Anth. Pal.* 16.65.

the presence of the pagan god's emblem.⁷² To keep the providentiality indistinct enough was an important point.⁷³

Conclusion

There is little reason to see Theodosius as a fanatical Christian himself: he was undoubtedly just as politically savvy for the repercussions of religious symbolism as Constantine himself, and there is no reason to automatically give credence to the way Christian writers co-opted him to suit their grand narrative of the inevitable triumph of the imperially sponsored and doctrinally 'correct' Nicene creed. His early rule was plagued by a serious dearth of legitimacy, which probably motivated some of his early legislation and actions in the religious sphere, but also – as has been suggested above – could have influenced his search for historical *exempla*. His triumphal arch at Forum Tauri makes capacious use of even 'pagan' tradition of imperial 'héracléisme' in purposefully hazy but unmistakably heroic-military support of this particular instance of averting a barbarian crisis by negotiation. It was a monument aligned both spatially and symbolically towards Dacia, the area of greatest triumph by Trajan, the *exemplum* for this later Spanish emperor planning to obtain a victory over the 'Getae' or Goths. Adrianople and the following years of insecurity had shocked the Romans deeply, and a new emperor – unable to do without the barbarians in the army – had to bolster his legitimacy by largely symbolic means. In this he seems to have been largely successful.

In what it comes to Orosius' hard-hearted sentiments about the Roman state being the winner whenever Gothic soldiers, even on their own side, were slain (*Hist.* 7.35.19), it can be argued that in the wake of Frigidus, such an observation could have been a conscious reaction to the official line of rhetoric that the eastern court had been propagating, for instance via Themistius: namely that it was beneficial that the Goths had not been completely vanquished. Both Christians and traditional pagans could either welcome or condemn an emperor who bolstered the Empire's defence capabilities by enlisting barbarian *foederati*, but for both groups it would also have been mostly reassuring to witness conventional gestures of imperial triumphalism, where the emperor was more central than the often hazily referenced divinity. The 'long fifth century', beginning with Theodosius' sons (especially Arcadius) but continuing much further through Byzantine history, built upon these themes in the Roman triumphalist ideology. The Eastern Roman ideology of Imperial victory would remain largely the same from the time of Theodosius I until the rise of Islam. Even so, in the context of the early Theodosians, the iconographical ambiguities and innovations entailed by their grasping for ascertained imperial providentiality were not always easily swallowed by the classically trained elite. Eunapius' reaction to Perses' display seems to testify that innovations in triumphalist iconography did not always please those who were used to the more traditional representations of the emperor's centrality.

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⁷² On this symbolic practice, see Saradi-Mendelovici 1990, 54. Such a cross could, of course, stem from even a much later period.

⁷³ Liebeschuetz 1979, 309; Lampinen 2013, 346, esp. n. 163.

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